There have been some exciting changes at Dove House since our last newsletter. A new management team has been put in place and is ready to lead Dove House to greater heights. The previous manager of Dove House, Bronach McMonagle, did a fantastic job in leading Dove House through trying times, she decided it was time to move on to new challenges. We thank Bronach for her hard work and dedication, and wish her well in her future endeavors.

Donncha MacNaillis has been appointed as Manager of Dove House. Donncha has shared with us his plans for the future of Dove House and it looks promising! With your continued support, they will continue to provide much needed services to the community. The following is an update from Donncha on some of the programs offered by Dove House:

Dove House Advice Service continues to lead the way in delivering effective benefit and welfare rights advice. With an ever increasing workload due to rising unemployment and benefit cuts, our late evening and weekend opening hours have further enhanced our ability to meet the needs of families who are struggling with money and debt stress, those experiencing unemployment or homelessness, and those who are dependent on state benefits due to low income, sickness, or disability.

In 2016 we helped over 5,000 people address over 11,000 issues. We expect 2017 to be an even busier year as we experience the full implementation of Welfare Reform.

YouthFirst & One Stop Shop, Derry

The Youth First and the One Stop Shop projects have both gone from strength to strength, the move of the OSS to the city centre has proved to be a very positive one. In 2016 1,180 young...
The Women of SIPS

The Still Imprisoned Project provides a helping hand to ex-prisoners who struggle in their effort to reclaim their lives and place in society. They often must cope with a myriad of physical and emotional problems resulting from their imprisonment.

Women comprise a significant percentage of this population but have often been overlooked or relegated to the background. Although the goal of reintegrating them into society is the same as it is for men, women have unique needs along the way. The women of SIPS are doing tremendous work to meet the needs of these women. They organize events exclusively for women to help them further their social, educational and emotional goals.

SIPS does not accept money from the government and therefore relies entirely on donations from groups like Conway Mill Trust to fund their operations. If you would like to assist them in providing these much needed services, simply write “SIPS” in the memo of your check or money order and 100% of your donation will be included in their next grant.

Drumcree Community Centre Progress Report

2016 was our first full year of activities following the major refurbishment works and extension to Drumcree Community Centre. The result of that welcome development is a bright, spacious and modern facility which is both fit for purpose and fit for the future of the community for years to come.

The community centre now incorporates a dedicated and fully equipped children’s room, a youth room, drop-in/social area, a computer room, main office and ample internal storage areas.

The centre also now has a large and well-equipped kitchen.

The extended main hall, fitted out with sports flooring and under-floor heating, can be partitioned into two set fully separate areas. New chairs and folding tables were also acquired for the hall and the new kitchen was provided with new crockery, cutlery, etc.

As has been demonstrated by a number of events held in the community centre during 2016, the main hall is capable of very comfortably catering for up to 120 people seated at tables.
Drumcree, from page 2

We are pleased to report that, since completion, the hall has been used by a number of external bodies for meetings and seminars by among others SureStart, the VERVE network, Neighbourhood Renewal/DfC, Migrant Support Services, the Healthy Living Centres Alliance, the Guinea Bissau Association, as well as other local groups.

There has also been a very noticeable increase in the use of the centre by local families for various family events, such as children's birthday parties, christenings, etc., with some bookings having been made well in advance. Our new portable PA system, complete with CD/DVD capabilities, and new disco lighting funded by Conway Mill Trust has enhanced the fun experience.

There are a variety of centre-based groups operating for children, adolescents and teenagers. All of our groups have seen significant increases in registration and attendance since completion of the renovations.

During 2016, a number of parents’ & children’s events were organised including: cookery sessions, stay and play sessions, and family day trips. These provided parents with the opportunity to spend ‘value time’ with their children and to get more involved in social inclusion events as well as in the community centre itself. The children also similarly benefitted through participation in a variety of activity days and trips. A new monthly family programme ‘Groovy Moves’ was added to our family-based activities in January 2016 and took the form of a monthly ‘Baby Rave’ event on Saturdays.

Many of the sessions for the above groups have been centre-based activity sessions which provide the young people with the opportunity to come into a safe, warm and caring environment in which they can participate and take part in various activities. Regular activities include arts and crafts; multi-games; cookery workshops; competitive games; movie nights; anti-bullying programmes; project and small group work.

The extended hall in the community centre has proven to be of a great benefit through our ability to organise a lot more indoor physical activities, such as a five-a-side football, indoor hockey and hurling, tennis, fundamental skills, coaching, etc.

Over the past year, Drumcree Community Trust’s staff and volunteers have successfully delivered a range of programmes, activities and events to our local community aimed at addressing a variety of needs within the area.
people accessed the OSS services for advice, support or a safe space to socialise. In regards to the Youth First project 867 young people from the Bogside and Brandywell areas of Derry have accessed the centre for the after school drop in, health and education programmes and diversionary day trips and residential. We ran a number of family events throughout the year and the whole community came out to support them.

One of the big successes for us this year was Feel Good Fortnight annual event run by the OSS to encourage young people aged 11 – 25 and their families to celebrate all that is good and positive in their communities and to challenge them to take the 5 steps to emotional well being Connect, Be Active, Keep Learning, Take Notice and Give. We ran 2 weeks of activities and 727 young people and their families took part in activities, ranging from Mindfulness sessions to football tournaments to a 5 K Walk/Run.

Niamh Canavan of the Women’s Advocacy Project provided us with the following update:

“The Women’s Advocacy Project based in Dove House in the heart of the Bogside supports women who have experienced or are experiencing Domestic Abuse. Support is tailor-made for each individual and includes one to one and group support, legal help, safety planning and much more.

We have run two successful campaigns to date with the most recent being at Christmas, entitled “Domestic Abuse is Child Abuse”.

We wish to provide the local residents with a female self-defence class this year and any financial aid would be greatly appreciated! I have included some pictures which outline how 2016 and what fun activities we have got up to.”

If you would like to help make programs like Youthfirst or the Women’s Advocacy Program succeed, simply write “Dove House” in the memo of your check or money order and 100% of your donation will be included in their next grant.
Revamped Museum of Free Derry set to open

The Bloody Sunday Trust said they are delighted to announce that the new Museum of Free Derry will open to the public on Monday, 20 February.

The new building, completed at a cost of around £2.4m, will host a full multi-media exhibition on the civil rights and early conflict era in the city, and also much needed and enhanced visitor facilities and education and research facilities.

Museum manager Adrian Kerr said: “We are all thrilled that the new museum is at long last ready to open. It has been a long and hard road, but the new building is worth the wait. It will allow us to do a lot more work in educating people about this very important era in our history, and will make a visit to the museum a much more rewarding and stimulating experience for all visitors, be they from the city or from across the world.

“It is, we feel, a stunning building that places this history in a place where it deserves to be, in a flagship building that shows how important this history is and how important it is that people come here to learn about it.

“The previous museum was very successful, with over 160,000 visitors passing through its doors, but the new museum will be even more successful in attracting visitors. After two years in temporary premises it will be fantastic to have the museum back where it is supposed to be, in the heart of the Bogside where so much of our story happened.

The artwork on the front wall of the museum was created by local artist Locky Morris and is entitled ‘We Shall Overcome’.

A spokesperson for the museum said: "The artwork was conceived as an integral part of the architecture of the museum itself. It uses the actual sound waveform of the moments on Bloody Sunday when the crowd sang 'We Shall Overcome'. These 21 seconds have in a sense been literally 'cut into' the fabric of the building and can be seen as a 'paean' to community resistance amidst deadly force. The notion of a huge moment of seismographic shift is also held in play within the work.

"The linear form and repetitions make reference to the original wooden fence that would have faced north on a similar axis along this part of Glenfada Park. Indeed this plane draws a line with the renowned 'rubble barricade' that ran across Rossville Street at that time which also hints at the idea of ‘An bhearna bhaoil’ - the gap of danger or frontline.

"The deliberate use of thick steel with the rust patina, edginess and ‘elemental’ feel of the finish is meant to be redolent of a period of urban conflict – which may bring with it a flood of images of barbed wire, burnt vehicles, broken paving slabs and the temporary barriers of scaffold materials, rusted reinforcing mats, rubble and planks.

"Although it exists firmly at the heart of this place and has its genesis around this momentous event, it is also meant to resonate outside its local context. Its aim is to connect, historically and contemporaneously, with a wider international communal struggle and desire for Justice and Civil Rights. The song itself of course, already the civil rights anthem in the USA, had become an anthem for the civil rights movement here in the 1960s."
Dear friends,

Another year and another semester at Conway Education Centre. Last week 27 new courses started, with 311 new learners coming through the doors of our education floor. It is busy and there is a great atmosphere.

Our new photocopier is working hard to provide all our learners with their handouts, learner notes and test papers. The photocopier was bought with your donations and has been a life saver for our centre, many, many thanks for your generosity.

Conway Education Centre is continuing with its work for all people in disadvantaged areas of Belfast, to increase confidence and skills, to achieve those important qualifications and to improve the chance to get a job. Our team of volunteer mentors work with those adult learners of Maths, English and Business Administration who need some extra support to give them the best possible chance to pass exams. Our exam pass rate for these three subjects has increased from 57% in 2013, to 70% in 2016. That’s a fantastic achievement as most of our learners would have been out of education for years and left school without any qualifications.

Another important subject to increase employability is IT. CEC offers a range of IT courses, from absolute beginners to advanced level. Over 117 learners per week use our computers. Our computer stock is varied, our oldest computers, from 2007, frequently break down and now need to be replaced. Government funding covers the cost of IT tutors, but it doesn’t provide computers. Through fundraising we have managed to raise some of the funds necessary to replace the five oldest computers, but we are £1100 short. We would respectfully like to ask you for financial support for this purpose.

Through collaboration with Queens University’s School of Psychology, research was carried out to evaluate the impact of learning on adult students at Conway. A sample of 100 students were sent a questionnaire and the responses were carefully analysed. The analysis was highly positive of the quality of courses, the professionalism of teachers and the welcoming and supportive environment at Conway. It also showed that 67% of learners moved on to a further course on completion, 29% of unemployed learners gained employment after obtaining a qualification. This is an excellent result and we’re very proud of the hard work of our students, tutors, volunteers and staff.

All this would not have been possible without support from friends like you in Conway Mill Trust USA. Your donations make a real difference in the lives of our students. Again many thanks for your generosity and if you’re in Belfast, please give us a call and come in for a cuppa and a chat.

Best regards, Pauline Kersten, Centre Manager Conway Education Centre
We received the following update from Father Des Wilson.

Hello all and I hope this letter finds you all well. As per usual it is all go here at Springhill Community House.

Our Complementary Therapy provision continues and we are running at full pace and are delivering therapies on a five week cycle to twenty people during each cycle. We deliver therapies with 250 clients each year all of whom are victims or survivors of the Troubles and in many cases are dealing with the consequences of what they have witnessed or experienced as long as 45 years ago. For many they have not received truth or justice and continue to fight the British System today.

Our area has been at the forefront of the Troubles and has experienced the very worst of it. We feel that the stories of individuals who lived and grew up in the area need to be recorded and kept as a true record of what people had to endure. Our Oral History Project continues to record the stories from our local community, to put on record their experiences so that future generations will have access to firsthand accounts of what really happened. Our most recent project consists of a group of Ballymurphy residents who want to record stories of residents from the 1950’s to 1969, the pre-Troubles period. This project should be completed at the end of 2017. We also plan a longer project over three years that will record stories and experiences during the Troubles, these will be transcribed and extracts published in a booklet.

As mentioned in our previous report our work in the community garden and allotments has been so successful that we are looking to develop more allotments on a derelict site in the Springhill area. We are working in partnership with local residents and community organisations to persuade the local city council to provide the funding.

The collapse of the Stormont Executive and pending elections has caused much uncertainty on many levels. Welfare reforms have affected many of those most in need within our community and they fear that direct rule from the British Government will hit them harder through more cuts in welfare. Victims seeking truth and justice are fearful that mechanisms for dealing with the past will not be implemented thus creating further delays.

We continue to work closely with the Ballymurphy Massacre Families in their search for truth and justice, just this weekend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland James Brokenshire has said investigations into killings during the Troubles are “disproportionately” focusing on members of the police and army. This is yet another example of the arrogant contempt the British Government has for the victims’ families who have been searching for the truth for 45 years. Thankfully the families are resilient, courageous and dignified and will continue their fight until they have the justice they deserve.

As always we remain grateful for your continued support. All here at the House send their best regards.

Fr. Des Wilson
Thank You!

Thanks to your donations, Conway Mill Trust has been able to advance toward our goal of rebuilding lives in Northern Ireland. We would like to take a moment to recognize your generosity and offer our sincere gratitude on behalf of our board members and the organizations we support.

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Have a Happy and Blessed Saint Patrick’s Day!